

LIVING BEYOND YOURSELF - Week #3

The Fruit of the Spirit is Joy

1 Peter 1:1-9

PATTI

These days the world seems to have a surplus of fear, worry, and discouragement - and an equally alarming shortage of JOY. During this pandemic, even the pursuit of excessive pleasure seems to have left people empty and wanting more (as it always does) rather than filling them with the kind of deep and abiding joy that Peter refers to in the opening words of his epistle.

“Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (I Peter 1:8-9).

Who was Peter addressing when he wrote of unspeakable joy? According to v. 1 he was speaking to persecuted Christians – people who had been driven from their cities, separated from their families... people whose rights and futures had been taken, along with their property and possessions. But their joy had NOT been taken. Why?

Another translation of v. 8 says, *“You have never seen Jesus and you don’t see him now. But still you love him and have faith in him” (I Pet. 1:8).*

The source of their joy was Jesus!
And since no one could take their Jesus,
no one could take their joy.

What about you? What has been taken from you in these difficult days?
Is it your health? Or your income? Have you buried a dream?
Or a marriage? Have you lost a friend?
Is your joy buried with your losses?

If so, you may be confusing joy and happiness.

While happiness is an emotion, God never intended for people to be in that emotional state all the time.

Ecclesiastes 3:4

[There is] **“a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance.”**

While happiness is dependent on the circumstances in which we find ourselves at any given moment, real joy comes from abiding in the One who is the SOURCE of true joy... Jesus.

In fact, Jesus says in **John 15:5**,

“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me and I in him bears much fruit.”

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For that reason the Bible speaks much more often about joy than about being happy. The root word of happy is **“hap”**. It means, “chance” and it is also the root of several words like happen, happening, haphazard, hapless, happenstance.

In other words, happiness is a good feeling that depends on something HAPPENING. Of course, God wants you to experience happy times (as long as he approves of what’s happening) but His greater desire is that you would have UNCONDITIONAL JOY.

In John chapters 15 and 16, Jesus tells us that HIS JOY will remain in his disciples and that that no one will be able to take it from them – from us!

Think of joy as a strong foundation that supports a variety of healthy emotions -
The long-range evidence of joy is general gratitude, contentment, optimism, a sense of freedom, and more.

Because true Joy looks,

not INWARD or
even OUTWARD
but UPWARD!

A common mistake that many of us
make is thinking that we lack something
that we need in order to be okay, in order
to be content...

and if we just had that thing, then
we would be satisfied.

Advertisers know this, which is why
every commercial promises joy.

Want some joy? Buy our pillow. Drink this beverage.

Want joy? Drive this car. Wear these shoes. Eat this food.

Every commercial portrays people discovering
joy in stuff that is mass-produced in factories.

Even Preparation H. Before using this cream,
the guy I saw in the commercial this morning was
frowning and squirming in his chair. But afterwards,
he was the picture of pure joy!

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Marketing people specialize in “if only’s”

If only you had this product. This thing. That relationship.

How many of us have said, “If only I had better health”?

“If only I had a better job, or more time, or a better car”?

Biblically, though, joy and happiness come
much more from GIVING and SERVING
than from RECEIVING and GETTING.

Yet it seems that so many people are
putting life on hold these days while
they wait for the thing that they think
will make it worth living...

An end to the pandemic.

Another stimulus check.

The right election results

(or the left ones, maybe,
depending on your preference).

But to grow in joy, we must resist,
not only self-pity, but also being
self-centered and self-absorbed.

Acts 20:35 - The Apostle Paul says...

"In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

In order for joy to flourish, it's focus must be on loving God and others, as it was for Christ Jesus. Because joy is largely comprised of GRATITUDE... Gratitude for the wonderful things God has done, and for the incomparable future He has promised to those who believe.

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1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

"Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray continually, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

If the fruit of the Spirit replaces in us the works of the flesh – things like resentment, anger, fear, worry, materialism, greed, lust, jealousy, complaining, and pride, then the result will be JOY!

There was a video that went viral several years ago in the wake of hurricane damage and flooding in Houston. It was of people who had lost everything, living in cramped conditions in a downtown shelter.

And this African American woman stands up and begins singing a song entitled, **"Spirit, Break Out"**. She sings,
*"Our Father,
All of Heaven roars Your name.
Sing louder*

*Let this place erupt with praise.
 Can you hear it?
 A sound of Heaven touching earth.
 Spirit, break out.
 Break our walls down.
 Spirit, break out.
 Heaven come down."*

Why do you think that video went viral?
 Why did millions of people around the world
 view that woman's song and share it with others
 over and over and over again?

Because she has no HAPPENING in her life that
 would cause her to sing – quite the opposite.
 Yet she is choosing hope and joy.

And not only is that something that people
 are longing for in their own circumstances,
 but she's pointing them to the source.

Joy is spiritual, supernatural, and essential.
 And it comes from God in endless supply.
 It's tragic that so many people see God as
 primarily somber and stern instead of
 enjoying and taking delight in his creation,
 and anticipating many new children of God
 who will find eternal life in Him!

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When Paul lists the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23,
 joy is second, preceded only by love.
 Because godly love produces joy.

Joy being second on the list surprises some people,
 who mistakenly think that joy is spiritually unimportant.
 Some religious people even shun joy, thinking that
 to be holy means somehow to always be solemn.

But joy is a major theme throughout Scripture, occurring 158 times in the King James version, along with the word "rejoice" which occurs 198 times. And that doesn't even take into account the variations such as *joyful, joyfully, joyous, jubilant, and glad*.

Biblically, joy is not optional.

In fact, it is commanded repeatedly, through emphatic exhortations such as

Philippians 4:3, where Paul says,

"Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!"

But if that's the case, then is it wrong to have SORROW? The Bible describes two kinds of sorrow.

2 Corinthians 7:10

"For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death."

Those who have joy frequently experience godly sorrow at the same time. It can be the sorrow of repentance, since those who feel the worst about their sins feel the greatest joy about their forgiveness and God's undeserved GRACE.

Another example is mourning over the suffering of ourselves or others, while having the joy of knowing that God will eventually solve all problems and wipe away all tears (Matthew 5:4, Revelation 21:4).

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Worldly sorrow usually has its origin in self-pity or victim mentality.

So while indulging in worldly sorrow

It's virtually impossible to have either godly sorrow or joy.

Isaiah prophesied that the messiah would be *"a Man of sorrows"* - sorrows over human sin and suffering (Isaiah 53:3)

Yet he was also prophesied to be
 “anointed with the oil of gladness more than
 his companions.” (Hebrews 1:8-9; Psalms 45:6-7)
 Christ Jesus experience both.

So what is the difference between godly sorrow and earthly sorrow?
 Between the two of us we’ve preached and presided at
 a lot of funerals lately. In fact, Jeff had two double funerals
 within a week of each other recently.

There’s been lots of grief, and grieving is
 a healthy response when a loved one dies.
 But if we believe the truth of the resurrection,
 we also have comfort and joy, because we
 know our loss is only temporary.

Perhaps that is why **All Saints Sunday** is so
 bitter-sweet for many of us as that list of
 names of those who have gone before are read.
 Yet the grief is much more painful for those
 who have no such hope.

We can even have joy in our trials,
 when we understand how God is using
 those trials to help us build godly character and hope.

James wrote, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many
 kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance...”
 perseverance in faith to the Lord. (James 1:2)

Think about all those people to whom our reading
 from 1 Peter was originally addressed, the ones
 scattered far from their homes who had lost so much.
 And let’s ask the same kinds of questions that they must have
 surely asked themselves in the face of so much adversity...

Can death take our joy? No, because Jesus is greater than death
 Can failure take their joy? No, because Jesus is greater than your sin.
 Can betrayal take your joy? No, because Jesus will never leave you.

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Can sickness take your joy? No, because God has promised—
 whether on this side of the grave or the other—to heal you.
 Can disappointment take your joy? No, because though
 your plan may not work out, you know God’s plan will.

Death, failure, betrayal, sickness, disappointment.
 They cannot take your joy, because they cannot take your Jesus.
 That’s not to say your life will be storm-free.
 Or that sorrows will never come your way.
 “In this world you will have tribulation,” Jesus said.
 “but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (Jn. 16:33).

The key to JOY is the Holy Spirit.
 After all, joy is part of God’s nature and character.
 We see proof of it everywhere in creation...
 birds singing, animals leaping, flowers blooming,
 brooks babbling, and sun shining.

God gives us these things and more to ENJOY!
 Because when we are joyful, we are most like Him.
 Luke says of Jesus’ disciples in Acts 13:52...
 they were “filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.”
 As we said before, the Spirit is given
 to each of us in baptism.

And we are filled with the Holy Spirit when we believe
 and come to a living faith in Christ.
 But the truth is that we get depleted.
 Life happens. Sin happens.
 And we become filled with other things...
 we allow ourselves to be filled with
 attitudes that are not of God.

What’s the solution, then?
 We need to be filled with the Holy Spirit
 over and over again.

It happens when we worship God together on Sundays and when we pray and study Scripture alone or as families during the week.

The filling of the Holy Spirit happens when we sing praises and receive Holy Communion. It happens when we have fellowship with other believers.

And it happens anytime, anywhere when we simply ask.

Luke 11:13

“If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

“Ask and you will receive, that your joy may be full.” (John 16:24)

Let's do that now...

PRAYER:

Father, we know that your New Testament Church was not known for its buildings, denominations, or programs, but for its joy. Amid the storms of this life, anchor our hearts to the shoreline of eternity, so that we never find ourselves adrift in despair. And fill us with the Holy Spirit, so that your joy may be our strength, today and always. In Jesus' name.